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Draft report**Addendum**

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Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (item 6)**More coherence for enhanced oversight in the United Nations system**

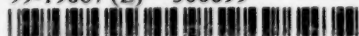
1. At its 3rd and 4th meetings, on 9 June 1999, the Committee considered the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "More coherence for enhanced oversight in the United Nations system" (A/53/171), the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination thereon (A/53/171/Add.1) and the related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/53/670). The report of the Joint Inspection Unit was introduced by John D. Fox, Inspector.

Discussion

2. Concern was expressed about the consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit. The report had already been formally introduced in the Fifth Committee. Such duplication should have been avoided.

3. Appreciation was expressed for the report as a very readable, informative and timely document that was based on good analysis and contained useful reference information in its table and annex. In addressing an issue of great current interest, the document also was considered to be thought-provoking, as shown by the extensive debate in the Committee on it.

4. The view was also expressed that the report was very descriptive and added nothing substantial to the debate on the question. Moreover, the report was not action-oriented and had no practical impact.



5. It was also stated that an evaluation of the functioning of the oversight mechanisms could have been more useful to identify the specific problems and recommend concrete solutions to the current problems of oversight in the United Nations system, in particular how to avoid any politicization of oversight at the United Nations.

6. Concerning the conclusions of the report in its executive summary, the view was expressed that there was no over-reliance on oversight mechanisms and that it was the duty of those mechanisms to identify the shortcomings in the performance of the United Nations system organizations. The view was also expressed that there was no blurring of the classical roles of internal and external oversight. The distinction was still clear according to the statutes, functions, scope of mandate and reporting procedures of each of them.

7. Regret was expressed that the report referred to a symposium on oversight held in October 1997, which was attended by some Member States of a specific group that does not represent the universal composition of the United Nations membership and therefore could not be used to represent accurately the views of Member States of the United Nations. A question was raised as to why the report did not refer to the debate held on the matter by some legislative bodies such as the Fifth Committee.

8. Support was expressed of the concept of shared responsibility for oversight, on which the report is based. However, it was noted that the necessary sharing of responsibility for oversight among the oversight mechanisms, secretariats and Member States in no way dilutes the responsibility of external oversight mechanisms for the full and effective performance of their functions. It was noted that the notion of shared responsibility requires that external oversight mechanisms first assume their primary responsibility by supporting independently and effectively the legislative organs in their oversight responsibilities. The view was also expressed that even though oversight cannot substitute for trust between Member States and the Secretariat, it is crucial that Member States be aware of cases of mismanagement.

9. The view was expressed that the report, while referencing the need to strengthen external oversight, put more stress on improving internal oversight. The view was expressed that emphasis on internal oversight reflected the current development of internal oversight mechanisms in the United Nations system. Interest was also expressed in a future Joint Inspection Unit report on the strengthening of external oversight.

10. Considerable discussion took place about whether or not Member States suffered from what was called "oversight indigestion" in the report. Use of the phrase in the report, in view of it having been drawn from a non-United Nations setting, was criticized. The view was expressed that Member States do suffer from being overwhelmed with oversight documents that arrive too late and are not coherently related to each other. The view also was expressed, that, if oversight indigestion existed at all, it was of a temporary nature and that it was better to be informed about problems in United Nations organizations by oversight documents rather than by newspapers. Contrary to the conclusion of the report, it was stated that there was no feeling of oversight indigestion. What was more needed was effective, action-oriented oversight instead of academic observations.

11. Regarding recommendation 1 on agreed plans for conducting internal oversight, the meaning of the word "plans" was clarified. As explained in the report of the Advisory Committee, rather than annual work plans, the word "plans" means proposals of the executive heads of each organization on the oversight structure to be established and the way to conduct and coordinate all its elements. Support was expressed for this recommendation, with the strong insistence, in accord with the report, that there was no expectation of the same model being applied to all organizations. It was stressed that the structures should be adapted to the specific needs and circumstances of each organization.

Nevertheless, the view was expressed that each organization should be free to choose their internal oversight mechanism according to their needs, and, in this regard, any proposal to coordinate and strengthen their internal oversight mechanism should be approved by their legislative organs. There was a question as to why executive heads should have to submit plans for this purpose to legislative bodies for their approval, since such information is included in normal programme budget submissions. It was explained that the different oversight mechanisms in most United Nations organizations are fragmented and the purpose was to consolidate such plans into one document so that Member States could more easily consider the matter as a whole and so that such consideration could be more focused specifically on internal oversight itself than would be possible in acting on an overall programme budget.

12. It was observed that the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination about micromanagement by Member States (A/53/171, para. 2) had raised serious concern, and a clarification was sought. The point was made that Member States had a legitimate right and obligation regarding the oversight function of the Organization. Article 10 of the Charter, read in conjunction with Article 7, did not put any restriction on Member States to discuss any question or any matter within the scope of the Charter.

13. Regarding recommendation 2 on reporting on internal oversight activities, it was observed that it is for each legislative body to determine the reporting procedure for both external and internal oversight mechanisms. The view was expressed that a more common systemwide format for reporting could increase the costs and complexity of existing reporting arrangements, as observed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The view was also expressed that the issue of recommendations made by internal oversight bodies was not a problem, since, by definition, those bodies make recommendations to executive heads and programme managers, not legislative organs. The view was also expressed that in the reporting procedures of internal oversight bodies, the legislative bodies of any organization should have a role in the consideration of their recommendations. Regarding the three separate elements of recommendation 2:

(a) **Recommendation 2 (a).** Support for this recommendation was expressed. Nevertheless, the view was expressed that it was up to the deliberative organs themselves to determine what action should be taken on the recommendations of the internal oversight body. The view was also expressed that internal oversight bodies should not, in any case, question the decisions taken by legislative organs, which are reviewed through established mechanisms. The need to avoid additional costs and complexity, which was of concern to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (A/53/171/Add.1, para. 3) was also addressed;

(b) **Recommendation 2 (b).** The view was expressed that, consistent with the point in the report of the Advisory Committee noted above, it was for legislative bodies to decide whether internal oversight reports should be submitted as documents of the executive heads or as documents that would not be subject to change by the executive heads. The view was also expressed that the internal oversight bodies were within the authority of executive heads and that they should not be considered as equal or parallel authorities. The view was also expressed that, while internal oversight reports should be made available to legislative organs as prepared by the internal oversight mechanisms, executive heads should take responsibility in the follow-up to their recommendations;

(c) **Recommendation 2 (c).** The need for this subparagraph was questioned, but the view was expressed that such a procedure would facilitate the reporting process. It was noted that the priority of legislative bodies must be respected and the decision of an executive head regarding his/her need for legislative authorization to implement an internal

oversight recommendation would be subject to approval by the appropriate legislative body. It was observed that the reports of internal oversight bodies should be submitted to the relevant legislative bodies for consideration and action and for any decision they may deem appropriate.

14. Regarding recommendation 3 on highlighting good practices, there was general support for the recommendation, with the observation that good practices for some organizations would not always be good practices for others. The view was also expressed that the recommendation was relevant.

15. Regarding recommendation 4 on Joint Inspection Unit analyses of consolidated annual summary reports on internal oversight activities, there was support for the concerns expressed in the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the report of the Advisory Committee about such analyses being just an added layer of reporting with questionable value. The question was also raised whether the Joint Inspection Unit could cope with this task in view of its lack of systematic reporting on reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. Nevertheless, the view was expressed that such analyses by the Joint Inspection Unit could provide helpful assistance to Member States in their making use of the annual internal oversight reports from all of the different organizations. It was pointed out that, rather than exhaustive and voluminous summaries of the internal oversight reports, the analyses would be the size of normal Joint Inspection Unit reports calling attention to systemwide problems and/or good practices that the Unit believes could be of interest to Member States. It also was noted that the recommendation called for issuing the analyses periodically rather than annually.

16. Regarding recommendation 5 on fostering a stronger professional oversight community, there was support for the recommendation, with the understanding that training was also to be included.

17. Regarding recommendation 6 on more dialogue among oversight partners, there was support for more dialogue, but concern was expressed about the nature of the dialogue and the need to assure its transparency. The view was also expressed that such arrangements were already in place in the United Nations system.

18. The view was expressed that there should have been a seventh recommendation regarding the need to assure monitoring and follow-up on oversight recommendations. It was pointed out that recommendation 2 called for annual reports on internal oversight activities that would include reference to the status of action taken on recommendations, but that this was an issue that could deserve a recommendation of its own. Related to this matter, the view was stated that one of the major problems for the Joint Inspection Unit was the absence of follow-up on its reports. It was noted that the Unit had included in its annual report two years ago¹ an annex entitled "Towards a more effective system of follow-up on reports of the Joint Inspection Unit" and that approval of that proposal was still awaited.

19. The view was also expressed that in the follow-up system of internal oversight bodies, those recommendations which could imply changes in legislative mandates should not be implemented without the prior approval of the pertinent legislative bodies.

20. In the context of the preliminary discussion on the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit, it was noted that at the current session the Committee was presented with only one report for its consideration owing to the lack of comments by the Administrative Committee on Coordination on other Joint Inspection Unit reports.

Conclusions and recommendations

21. The Committee noted the observations of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on micromanagement (A/53/171/Add.1, paras. 2 and 7) and emphasized the role of Member States under the Charter.

22. The Committee concluded that oversight should not be considered a panacea for making things right in the United Nations system.

23. On the recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

(a) Recommendation 3. The Committee recommended approval of this recommendation, on the understanding that all good practices cannot be replicated throughout the United Nations system and that the respective legislative bodies should take decisions, as necessary, in this regard;

(b) Recommendation 5. The Committee recommended approval of this recommendation subject to the comments by the Administrative Committee on Coordination in paragraph 6 of its report (A/53/171/Add.1) regarding confidentiality of certain data and cost-effectiveness of some of the initiatives;

(c) Recommendation 6. The Committee recommended approval of this recommendation, on the understanding that the dialogue should be through relevant established forums.

24. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to expedite obtaining the comments by the Administrative Committee on Coordination for due consideration of the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit by the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

Notes

¹ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 34 (A/52/34).